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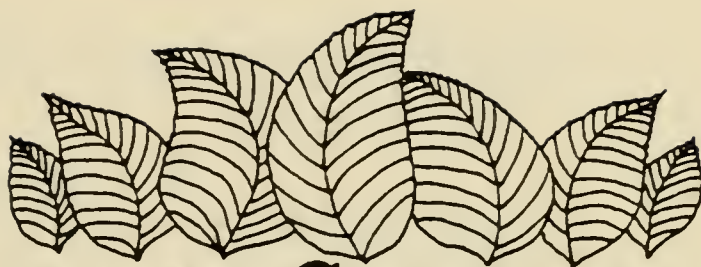
THE ELM CITY REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN JOURNAL
OF ARTS AND LITERATURE



Spring 1991

Volume 1, Number 1



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OF ARTS AND LITERATURE



A Celebration of Human Diversity

Spring 1991

Volume 1, Number 1

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is a publication
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Ed Renaud

YOU SEE, WE'RE ALL REALLY MADMEN

You see, we're all really madmen
Trying to form that string of words,
That pattern of sounds,
That motion on the stage or screen.

It's a form of possession,
Demons, angels, lost spirits taking control of you.
We are compelled,
And if we are lucky,
If the impulse is pure,
the world is a more beautiful place as a result.

I can't tell you where the sounds come from
Any more than I know where the words or the images go.
The origins are lost
With the first masters
Who struck tortoise shells with sticks,
Danced around open fires,
And painted antelope on the ceilings.

A million different patterns,
A billion different meanings.
Each one trying to capture a different angle,
A different theme or pattern in this life.
That touches something inside of you,
And makes you say, "Yes! I know! I feel! I too experience this."
And in that, tell you that they are not alone.
That others feel what you feel,
See what you see,
Know what you know,
And are not afraid to scream it to the world.

We are possessed, compelled, hopeless madmen.
Bearing our souls in paint, sound, and meter,

Asking you to indulge in and approve of our insanity.
Blessed and cursed with this extra need,
This drive to create--
To tear out our hearts and show them to you,
And let you peer into our souls through the open wound.

Jacqueline Salerno A.

THE FEAST OF IMMOLATION

It was July 23, 1990, the beginning of one of the most important holidays in the Islamic religion. Everyone in Cairo, Egypt was getting ready for the sacrificial celebration.

I was in Cairo for the second time. The heat was unbearable and getting worse. It was so humid that I drank four liters of water a day.

Nothing seemed to have changed. The poverty was the same. People still had no place to sleep and passed their days and nights on the banks of the Nile River. They also washed their clothes and ate there.

On the streets, mothers and their five or six children begged for money. It was almost impossible to say no when looking at those faces, and so I usually bought the children "shawarma" and falafel," traditional Arab food. The streets of Cairo were crowded with people pushing each other, trying to buy food. The market was full of women with their hair covered and children crying on the streets, maybe because they were tired of the heat and hungry.

The traffic in Zamalek, where I lived for three months, was the same. After a while I even got used to the incessant beeping of the cars' horns. The small outdoor cafes were filled mostly with men smoking tobacco from "chichas."

Everyone was talking about the holiday. Skinned cows and sheep hung out in the open beams in the the meat shops. The streets were decorated with multi-colored lights. The atmosphere reminded me of the pre-Christmas season. Everyone was rushing in the streets trying to buy last minute gifts and food for the celebration.

Two days before this sacrificial celebration started, something unusual had caught my attention. At almost every corner, a live cow was tied to a tree. The next morning, using my limited knowledge of Arabic, I asked the man what was he going to do with his cow. Then he told me, "We will kill her tomorrow at 3:00 a.m., and you are welcome to come and see the celebration." His statement surprised me, because in the busy city of Caracas, where I come from, we do not kill cows in the streets. At the same time, the thought of observing the killing of the cow was something incredibly interesting.

For most of the evening, I listened with fascination to my four Egyptian friends who explained how the cow would be killed. At 2:30 a.m., I arrived at the spot where the ritual was to take place.

The cacophony of the streets in the daytime was conspicuously absent. An occasional passing taxi broke the stillness of the night. Street lights provided the only illumination of the scene. I thought it was ironic that the crowd of people were expressing tenderness toward the cow.

The owner of the cow had not arrived yet; only his sons and his daughters were there. They explained to me that half of the meat would be given to the needy people, and the other half would be eaten the same day by the family. They explained that the cow would be killed by a young boy who was about fifteen or sixteen years of age.

After a short while, the boy joined the group. He came from a small nearby village and was still carrying its smell. His clothes had holes and were dirty, but his face had the innocence of inexperienced youth. He was dark with big black eyes; the bones in his face were prominent. His body was very slim, so much so that he seemed malnourished. He wore broken sandals that would probably only last for a few more days. He told me he was looking forward to the killing because he would be paid sixty Egyptian pounds (about \$13.00). He planned to buy his mother a gift.

The owner of the cow arrived, and the ritual was ready to begin. A few minutes before the killing of the cow, I observed that she seemed calm, and her big brown eyes gave the impression of sadness; it was as if she felt that death was coming to her. I wondered if the boy felt any of my sympathy for the animal before he stabbed her with his big, long knife. She did not die quickly--he had to smash the cow's head a few times before she lay still. Then he cut the animal's throat, and the blood began to flow out onto the streets. People approached to dip their hands in it. Afterwards they wiped the blood from their hands on the walls and on the cars. Caireness believed that by doing this people will not have any envy in them. The ritual ended by cleaning the cow and the streets with buckets of water. I had been taking pictures of the scene during the entire ritual. I had never seen anything so fascinating in my life.

After the ceremony ended, I went to a small cafe for tea with my Egyptian friends. By now it was almost 5:30 a.m., and thousands of worshippers filled the streets and made their way to the Mohammed Ali Mosque. Most of the men had changed their clothes and were wearing clean "galabias," the traditional snowy white, long robes. The women had bright veils covering their heads. Children of all ages held the hands of their parents. The vivid sunrise poured its light on the worshippers.

As I walked that morning towards my apartment, flashbacks came to my mind of what I had observed and learned. What seemed bizarre at first now made more sense to me. True, the sacrifice involved the killing of an innocent animal, but through its death, the needy would have something to eat, and the worshippers would feel purged in spirit. For at least one day, two hungers would be relieved.

Karen M. Berka

A CASTLE IS BUILT IN MY MIND

A castle is built in my mind
Thoughts become actions and
brick by brick the fortress is made
Your words become mortar
My pain becomes clay
Slowly the door is drawn shut (to my soul)
and bolted
to keep you away



PROBING THE DEPTHS, OR A WHIMSICAL JAUNT THROUGH THE THREE LEVELS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

All people lead three lives. Or rather, all people live one life that is divided into three basic sections: the public life, the private life, and the secret life. Understanding any person completely is rather like spelunking. One starts out on the surface and probes deeper down, where it gets progressively darker and more dangerous. But, with enough rope and a good, strong flashlight, one *can* "probe the depths of the human soul," so to speak.

We begin with the public life, fairly close to the surface, pretty much accessible to all. This is where all the average traits of people can be found. Where they work, their favorite foods, what they do for fun, whether they're Republican or Democrat, Pro-Choice or Pro-Life, and so on. These are fairly innocuous facts, not embarrassing or anything. Of course, some people are more open about some things than others. For instance, one can meet someone who will reveal his sexual preferences before his political ones. But we're sticking to basics here.

As we descend further into the depths of being, we come upon the private life. Many people confuse the private life and the secret life, or think they are one and the same; they are quite different. The private life holds all the things we do when nobody's looking, but it wouldn't be *too* embarrassing if we were caught in the act. These are the things we do at home at 3 o'clock in the morning, the cartoons we sneakily watch when we can, the pictures of us naked in the tub when we were babies, et cetera.... We won't tell this to just *anyone*, but if it gets out, we'll live. This is the kind of stuff we tell our girl/boyfriends to make them think they really know us. But the *real* juicy dirt is further down....

...It the secret life. The secret life is where you find the stuff that *nobody* knows, except maybe our shrinks. These are the things that have to be dragged out into the open: the women's lingerie in the back of the closet, the one-night stand you had with your neighbor while your girlfriend was out of town, and other sordid facts. It's dangerous delving this far down into the psyche, because here, *no one's welcome*--no one. And so, back up we go, to the bright light of day. But before we go, let us give some thought to the immortal words of William James, who said, "Whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is."

APPLICATIONS

Dancing across the hazel timber-tops with angry progress,
Never before seen, Murderer of nature's Mother's dream
Lanterns at half-mast flicker with every pass.
The rooftops rumble as screaming winds glaze us
with their whistling brass.

Anchor the gusts to the elements of autumn, as
Charcoal-sweetened air scrapes against the sky
With darkened clasps fastened; Never to be undone.
An absurd poet stops and questions: Why?

Just level the forests--turn out the lights.
Suffocate the furnace--insure a billion winter nights.
Soon it will be real--the signs respond: Surprise.

Amazon snows blaze in the deep of winter.
Arctic rivers flow blackened to the core.
Circulating rain rubs against the ivory, in
The final years of metropolitan cheers--senile troubadour.

PRIORITIES AND VALUES

Towering brick columns
Loom ominously skyward
Amid leafy-green trees
Pouring chemical smoke
Into the air:

Circular brick and mortar
Built by advanced modern men
In the name of progress,
Meticulous in their efforts
To magnify monetary gain.

Sparkling granite steeples
Whose tapered points and crosses
Struggle to stretch heavenward
Share the scenery only to
Remain in the grey shadows:

Spires and ornate crosses
Carved long ago by seasoned hands
Of faithful strong men
Meticulous in their efforts
To magnify the presence of God.

In measured proximity
They face one another everyday,
Both in the work place
And on the Sabbath.

Brick, Mortar and Smoke--
Granite and The Word--
One yields poison and progress,
The other preaches piety and purity.

Each part has been set into place,
Quarried and cultivated.
But somehow, the parts
Don't seem to fit:

Confused Priorities
And Conflicting Values.

BIRD'S-EYE BOAT LAUNCH

It is a cold, blustery day in March as I walk across the gray weathered planks of the Bird's-eye Street Boat Launch in Stratford, Connecticut. There is a slight scent and taste of salt in the breeze. The screeching of birds and the muffled sound of the fishing boat engine fill the air. The Bird's-eye Street Boat Launch facility is located where the murky brown water of the Housatonic River mixes with the real salt water of Long Island Sound. As I stroll toward the water, it occurs to me that I really enjoy the sensory impressions of the seashore.

Directly in front of me is an old, weathered gray fishing boat. It carries a small outboard engine upon its stern. The captain is wearing florescent-orange overalls and a wrinkled tan flannel shirt. He is experiencing great difficulty in maneuvering his craft along side the barnacle-covered pylons which hold the moss-covered dock in the place. The river's current is very strong. As I cast my eyes down, a "Wonder Bread" bag just below the water's surface swiftly drifts by. At the far end of the dock, an old woman dressed in a pale-blue overcoat and a snug-wool hat looks on. With a gloved hand, she shelters her eyes from the afternoon sun. As she turns from the fishing boat, she shuffles toward a man in khaki pants, black coat, and a chocolate-brown derby. From a "Stew Leonard's" shopping bag, he is feeding stale dinner rolls to a flock of seagulls, swans and ducks. The birds begin circling around him much like children do when ordering their favorite sundae from the ice cream man.

To my right, I see golden marshland grass which resembles a swarm of locusts, as the wind rustles through each stalk. Just beyond the grass on the horizon is a large work boat with a massive rusted hoist plowing its way out to sea. On the stern of the vessel the name *Orca* is partially submerged. As the boat labors on its way, it thrusts past a cluster of white-mooring markers which are loosely dancing up and down in the boat's wake, as it leaves behind a white frothy foam.

Making their way toward the dock to my left are four white trawlers, one directly behind the other, like ducklings following their mother. Their abraded bows crash through the white-capped, wind-torn waves in an attempt to reach port. Directly to my left, near the water line is a faded white house trailer seated upon concrete blocks. At one end of the trailer are two redwood picnic benches. Their surfaces boast bird droppings and deeply carved obscenities, commenting on the town's police force. A few steps

beyond the benches stands a pay telephone blanketed with such graffiti markings as: "Mary loves Bob," "For a great time call Sharon 555-6739," and "Hussein sucks." The telephone is hanging from its receiver and is swinging like a pendulum back and forth in the strong sea breeze.

Abruptly, I look down at my watch and realize that my lunch hour is nearly over. As I turn to head back to work, it occurs to me that there is a certain soothing, natural rhythm about the sea and its surroundings. The problems and tribulations of everyday life fade away and become briefly irrelevant compared with the tranquility of the seashore.

Barbara B. Esposito

OUR GIFT TO POSTERITY

Pleasant View Service Station
sits on Highway Nine,
across from a car cemetery,
where chunks and pieces
of metal and glass
have come to rest
to form a great pyramid,

our gift to posterity:
no pleasant view.

THE ROUTE

We all rode the same route every day on bus number seventy one. Our lives revolved around crushes and what our mothers packed us for lunch. By the time I reached the seventh grade I listened less and less to the nonsense of the small society on the bus and began paying more attention to what we drove past each day. I was the second-to-last person to be dropped off in the afternoon. The trip took about an hour. Even that, after a while, became predictable, repetitive, and boring, until one day in spring of that same year.

I was staring out the window of the bus absorbing the fading sunlight when we passed a small graveyard. For some reason the graveyard looked different that day. The usual half-falling-over grave stones and tall, unattended crab grass growing over the side of the fence surrounding the area were all in their typical fashion. But there was one thing wrong with this picture--a new grave, the fresh earth mounding above the level of the encasing grass with a new unweathered stone reluctantly shining in the light.

The girl that got off at that stop jumped the fence and sprinted past the grave on the way to her house on the other side of the block. She passed by the grave without so much as a hesitation in her step. I was not so unaffected.





NUMBERS DANCE WITH CALCULATED GRACE

Numbers dance with calculated grace.
Currency changes hands, futures are bought and sold.
The roar of the mighty engines shatters the silence.
Buildings, improving, creating, and destroying.
And fear, uncertainty, choice, and opportunity are quaint
 little anachronisms.
There is no safety from the new order.
I stand and watch.
What else can I do in the face of this?

The wind blows between the trees.
An inhuman moan can be heard in the distance.
Thunder picks up the chorus.
Lightning caresses the Earth like the fingers of a cruel mother.
Birds look anxiously about, seeking , begging for shelter from
 the coming torrent.
But no shelter comes, and when the rain begins, nothing is safe.
I stand and watch.
What else can you do in the face of this?

But there is strange comfort in the storm.
In a world where numbers dance with calculated grace.
And mighty engines shatter all in their path,
In the seemingly inescapable new order of progress;
I look into the storm and see chaos.
No illusions of scheme,
No pretense of scientific prediction,
Just reassurances that not all things have a plan.
What calculation is there in a gust of wind,
Or a flash of lightning?
What had guides the rain?

So here I stand, and watch the rain fall about me:
Gray beams of water, striking the ground.
Then in the folds of the sky, where the clouds and the lightning
 meet, a pair of yellow eyes glare at me.

And in the crack of thunder, the voice of the lightning calls:
"Go back indoors, and cower with the rest of your kind. It is not safe
for you here, for you are not of the storm."
But there is no safety, anywhere.
And the lightning is wrong, I am of the storm.
In the storm nothing is certain. It knows no truths, it makes no deals.
The storm holds no promises of tomorrow.
It asks you not for judgment, and cares not if you pass it.
For after a while, the storm will move on, and what will the storm
have but itself?
The storm visits, it dances and talks for a while, then eventually
moves on, alone: as in truth we all do.
Yes, I am of the storm.
Sometimes friend, sometimes foe, but honest at least.
So I move, and talk, and live the adventure of the day.
What else can I do in the face of this?

AN OLD CAR

Just after we moved into our house in Springfield, my brother, Glen, and I went out behind the house to explore the wooded fantasy land. What we found was absolutely amazing. To an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old, what we found was the most beautiful thing imaginable.

What we found was a very old car. It was painted a bright, almost turquoise color. We had never seen anything like it. Dad said that it was a 1951 something or other; at eight, though, I wasn't interested in car makes and models. Inside the car was a refrigerator, a very old, rusted, bulky refrigerator. We were fascinated.

Unfortunately, whoever had lived in our house before us, or whoever had lived in the house before them, had decided to dump a bunch of garbage in the woods behind the house. All around the old turquoise car, cans and soda bottles were scattered. There were old coffee cans and jelly jars, Clorox bottles, and many containers without labels.

For some reason, we forgot about the car and all of the wonderful treasures around it. It wasn't until about two years later that we rediscovered the relic. My father had been clearing away dead trees in the woods; in the process he cleared two paths behind our house, an upper trail and a lower trail so that he could drive his truck through the woods. The upper trail gave us direct access to the old car, and we intended to make use of it.

It was all my brother's idea, like everything else was. I was sure that our mother was going to yell at us if we did it, but we decided to do it any way. We took our BB guns and walked down the path, past the well, to our targets. I can still remember that very first shot; I hit my target. One of the remaining windows of the car shattered. At first, I was excited by the noise and the fact that I actually aimed well, but I also felt a little saddened. The car was not a living thing, but it was almost as if I had killed the car when I hit it. My brother aimed, and he too hit his target. Like a normal child, I soon forgot my feeling and joined my brother.

When we were finished, there was not a single glass article that stood. Even the plastic Clorox bottles had BB's rolling around inside of them. We walked around the old car examining the damage we caused. We were satisfied that we had done our duty and demolished almost everything in sight. Of course, we could come back to the car some other day, and shoot up the cans that lay rusted out near the bumper of the car; they were in pretty bad shape as it was, but they still remained an easy target. As I suspected, my mother was not very happy with us. She was worried that

we could have gotten hurt by all the glass we shattered with our guns. Glen and I sat in our separate chairs and humored our mother, remembering the whole time how much fun we had had.

In the winter Glen and I rode our snowmobiles through the woods behind the house. We often raced each other over the paths that our father had cleared, and we would stop next to the old car to rest. During the winter, the old car looked so sad, if that is at all possible. The caved-in roof was covered with snow and some small dead maple branches that the wind had torn from the trees. Inside, the refrigerator was also covered with some snow that had blown through the glassless windows. The headlight frames alone were not covered with snow. It seemed no matter how much snow we had during the winter, it never stayed in the headlight frames. It was almost as if the car had been crying when the snow would slowly melt and drip down the front of the car.

I can also remember the sense of pride with which I showed several of my friends the car in the woods. My mother was always embarrassed to find out that I had been giving tours of the "mess." My friends were impressed, as I knew they would be. Nobody that I knew had an old car in his or her woods. That made me superior in some childlike way.

I write about this old car because it had an impact on my growing up. Maybe it was my one connection to the past that I always hoped I could lived in--the Fifties. How I wanted to be a teenager in the Fifties. Maybe it had to do with the fact that I was the only kid around who had an old car in the woods. Mostly, though, I think that it had such an impact on me because it was always there. I often walked down to the car, year after year, only to sit near it and think. I spent many hours just sitting near it, crying because of my mother, crying because of a boyfriend, or a fight with my best friend. I dreamed about my mansion that I knew I would own someday; I thought up dramatic scenes that I would have with a movie star; I wondered what my life would be like in the future. No matter what, my car never moved, and always seemed to be listening to me when no one else would.

About ten years later, I walked down the path once again to the car of my childhood. I was amazed at what I saw, or by what I didn't see. There, where the turquoise car once sat, was a large brown spot. Rotten pine needles and twigs lay where my car used to be. The refrigerator too was gone, and so were all the dented Clorox bottles. All that remained of my prized pile of rubble was scattered bits of glass sparkling through the pine needles and maple leaves.

My father had told me over the phone that he had someone take the car away. When he told that the "mess" was finally gone, I really didn't care much. When I sat on the maple tree stump and looked at the spot where my car once was, all of those childhood memories came flooding back to me. A lot has changed.

Karen M. Berka

To J.D.

I remember you
so clearly
like it was just yesterday when we went on
long drives down country roads with the wind in our hair
and we reached out during the night
for the stars and satellites above

They always seemed so far away
but you were near by
and I could always count on your touch
to bring me closer to them

We lived for the moment
discovering truths about each other
creating our own universe
shutting out all others
and it was a perfect world
for as long as it lasted

But the moment was over too soon
and when daylight came
our dreams dimmed in the haze of the sunshine

The realities we tried so hard to make come true
are still there
just hidden for now
but when we meet again
we'll get in the car and drive
until we reach the sky
and can hold onto the stars forever

JUST WORDS

Sometimes I say things
that I shouldn't,
just to hurt people . . .
you.

Because
I want them . . .
you to feel the pain
that I'm feeling.

I never mean those words.
After all, they are just that.

But damn them!
They seep
out of my mouth,
forked-tongued and bitchy.

You wouldn't believe how sorry
I feel after I've said them.

Why did I treat you that way?
I love you.

You sit there lifelessly
like a sponge and absorb
every slap,
 accusation,
every filthy, sarcastic remark
my mind dredges from its trash can.

I hate myself for being
insensitive and reckless
with you.

And still you forgive . . .
Why?

Because you know it's not me talking,
don't you?

You know it's
all my pain,
 my losses,
all my fears
leaking
 out
uncontrollably at one time.

Only you seem to understand.
I suppose that is why I turn
to you
so often.

YESTERDAY, I SAW THE SNOW FALL

I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Sarah Michaels. I know that name seems rather boring; however, my life has been anything but. I came to talk to you because of my best friend's bitching. She said that you were very good and well worth the money. Ok Doc, where should I begin?

What do I like? Well that's original . . . let's see. I like the first snow. It covers the ground in a blanket of white, hiding all the sorrow and despair beneath its frigid sheets.

Yes, I'm a writer. It's a hobby of mine. Don't interrupt so much--I might lose the spirit of the moment. Anyway, where was I . . . snow.

The beauty of it only lasts for a few hours and then the snow trucks come and empty the streets of their hiding place, pouring mud and salt on the slippery pavement. I sometimes wish that I could lie on the streets and let the snow cover my body, cover my sorrow and fears. But, you know what would happen . . . a snow truck would come whizzing by, dump mud in my face and push me to the side of the curb to wallow like a pig in the brown slush. It makes me feel like someone's out there trying to keep my life from having any peace. The first snow is kind of like the first time you have sex. You go through your life wondering when it will happen, and then out of nowhere it does. The gentleman lying on top of you takes away all your frustrations, pumps the life back into you, and then disappears searching for new territory to conquer. The sad part is that you sit and wait for another snow hoping it will last longer than the first. I'm sorry if I'm embarrassing you, but that's the way I am, always cracking a bad joke in an awkward situation

I used to talk during sex, as a way of getting to know the person I'm passionately rolling around in bed with. It's easier to find out what a person is really like when you're screwing each other's brains out than when you're in a bar discussing the price of a drink. Isn't it funny how you can do things to each other that most states consider illegal, but God forbid you should use their toothbrush in the morning. Now *that's* gross. Yes, I've picked up men in bars. Why not? Someone has to make sure they get home to their wives in the morning.

Don't get me wrong, I love men. I absolutely adore them . . . especially when they are sleeping. They can't cause you any pain then. I guess I've been burned one too many times.

I know what my grandmother would say if she heard me talking like this. She'd say, "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, Sarah Lynne." My

grandmother was a strict Catholic who went to church every Saturday and Sunday, prayed during the week and made damn sure her one and only angel went to the proper Catholic girls school. I get sick to my stomach every time I smell wet woolen skirts. I don't think I have one piece of clothing that came from a sheep. In case you didn't pick it up in that little notebook of yours, I was raised by my grandparents. My mother killed herself when I was eight, my father's a drunk, and there's nothing more I want to discuss concerning those two. Actually . . . my mother was very sad. She loved father very much and did everything to please him. It was never enough. Every day there was another bruise. Nothing pleased the old bastard. I haven't talked to father in ten years. The image of him will always be with me even when he's dead and gone. I think I'll always remember his hands. They were so large and calloused and very painful.

My grandmother Ann won't tell me anything about my father, her son. She said, "He died many years ago and that his death was the Lord's way and I should let things alone." I don't believe he's dead, but I let things alone just the same. Anyway, where was I?

On yes, I was raised by my grandparents who kept my life very sheltered. I didn't have many friends, and the word "boyfriend" was blasphemous. I did have one best friend. We shared everything together. My grandparents liked her because she had a way of bullshitting them with a little-miss-innocent act. She was a very pretty girl. She was the first to show me how to use makeup. She also taught me the ins and outs of sex . . . no pun intended. You see Janice lost her virginity the old fashioned way . . . in the back seat of a car with Jimmy Rodgers. She admitted that she didn't love him. It was then that I learned that having sex and making love were two different things, and when it came right down to it, each one felt good. We did everything together until she couldn't anymore Janice was sixteen when she died of cancer, and it was then that I also experienced what dying was really like. Janice was dying, rotting way on the inside, until death came and took her outside. I felt sorry for my mother then, and I prayed that she died suddenly instead of slowly like Janice. I think I could have loved my mother the way I loved Janice. Maybe I could have given her some sense of hope, and she'd still be alive today. But, like everything else in my life, she left too.

Ok, this subject is beginning to bring me down--how about you? What do you say to getting on to another topic? Religion, maybe? I'm not a very religious person. Oh, I was as a child. I used to get down on my hands and knees every night and pray to the good Lord above for things that I thought were so important. I prayed for love and affection from my grandparents and received indifference and abuse. I suppose my grandmother tried her best with me. She just didn't know what affection was. One time I ran to her crying because the kids at school were making fun of me, and she asked me what I did to provoke the situation. Can you believe that? She asked me what did I do. My grandfather wasn't any better. I remember

that I was ten years old, and they were having a birthday party for me. My grandparents invited all the good little children from Sunday school to come over and celebrate in my honor. I swear I didn't even know half of those obnoxious, candy-faced little shits.

I went out into the kitchen to get something to drink, and . . . my grandparents had one of those old wood burning stoves in the kitchen. . . Well, I was getting a drink, and my grandfather came in and asked me how his little birthday girl was doing. I said that I was fine and walked over to the stove. He asked me if I liked the new dress he bought me. As he did this he ran his hand up the inside of my dress. I got scared and backed up against the stove, burning my hand. I guess he panicked because he never touched me again. Like father, like son!

This is a two hour sessions right? I hope I'm not boring you You're awfully quiet. I'm sorry. I get a little sensitive to rejection or just quiet. I'm sorry. Most of my life has been a kind of role playing. Each person that I meet causes me to portray a different person. I don't think anyone knows the real me. I'm just afraid that if I open up and let some of that vulnerability show that the person I've come to trust and maybe love will leave me. I've had two very special men in my life. One of them used me and then left me for someone else. The second one Well, I'm working on that relationship. It isn't always easy because I've let a lot of my past creep into our present, and Jack has a hard time understanding it all. He tries, but I guess it's my fault also. I clam up and pull away sometimes. See the first guy that I was serious about was so intense. He was always hiding himself. I thought that I knew him but not enough to stop him from hurting me. He was a liar. I mean he was a chronic liar. He would do or say things, and later I would find out he had made it all up. I guess I fell for him because he had this mysterious quality about him. He wrote poetry, mostly about things that he didn't understand nor could have. It's sad that I let him control my actions. I became what he wanted and not what I needed to be. Jack is different.

He lets me open up slowly. He never scares me. Sometimes, it's not enough, is it? I mean I'll always be afraid that he'll leave. I haven't told him very often that I love him. Maybe it's because he loves me unconditionally and doesn't force me to make sacrifices. He's the first person who really cares. It's really amazing, isn't it? It took a two hour session and one hundred dollars to come to this conclusion. There once was a time when I would have ended it all because I felt that there was no good in people, but life isn't living if you don't experience pain and realize that love is a precious gift that so few experience.

Same time next week? You know, yesterday I saw the snow fall, and it made me cry so hard. Jack just held me and said, "I understand. Just let it go. Soon it will all melt away." Listen, I've got to go there's someone I need to thank.

DEATH

I arrive silently
Like the early morning fog
That steals the view,
Uninvited

I choose randomly
Like Lady Luck's roulette
Plucking a prize,
Unscrupulously

I materialize suddenly
Like a bold apparition
Without appointment,
Unwanted

To take you
Like the experienced traveler,
On your final journey
To eternal sleep, and the
Unknown.



BARBIE NO-HEAD

Milton lay across the back porch table
His left foot resting on Barbie
Who lay sprawled over her sports car
Her head jammed beneath the driver's seat.

Outside squirrels were racing over the wire fence
And up the tallest pine tree.
Milton thrust his nine-year-old body forward
His head turning toward the screen windows
And Barbie's car rolled with him
Still under his left foot.

Her slender body contorted painlessly
And her head snapped off and remained lodged
Under the black bucket seat of the sports car
Her golden hair adorning the simulated carpet.

THE DOG

I am a soft-hearted person. My heart has the consistency of instant mashed potatoes; it lacks the starchy substance to remain firm. I am also an animal lover. This combination will usually produce a person with too many pets. By the way, ONE . . . is too many.

Through the years, I have had many experiences with pets. I am well aware of the hazards, heartaches, and hairballs; yet I am putty in puppy paws. After each heartbreak, each death of a canine friend, I swear that it will be the last. That's it! No more dogs! But soft hearts are weak, and only six months can pass before I start getting itchy-fingers to stroke puppy fur.

My last moment of weakness was four years ago. I had gone on an errand to buy a loaf of bread. I found myself some twenty miles away from home at a small convenience store which, oddly enough, was on the same road as the Humane Society. What harm could it do to stop in and leave a small donation . . . needless to say, the bread took the back-seat, while the collie-shepherd sat up front. I named her Tina. Her body was a wee bundle of fluff, and her feet were the size of two-by-fours.

The first noticeable annoyance was her instinct to chew. Manufacturers promise us that their rawhide products, in assorted shapes and sizes, will curb a puppy's craving to chew; I've got news for them. Tina mutilated every sock, every shoe, every loose tile in the family room, but never one of "her" toys or "her" pillows. At least I hadn't acquired a fool.

During her first year, Tina's body size quickly caught up to her shoe size. She quickly learned that if she stood on those giant rear feet, the world would be in easy reach. The dog now had the ability to reach where paws should not go. During this time, she developed a special appreciation for toothpaste. For Tina, the refreshing flavor was a mere after-dinner mint. Because the children rarely remembered to put the tube back in the cabinet, we always had the pleasure of Tina's minty fresh breath.

As we know, all puppies wee, wet, tinkle, or pee-pee, whatever the term you're most comfortable with. I have often thought of bottling it and marketing it as a floor stripper. If your linoleum suffers from wax build-up, this will do the trick. Now I am thankful that Tina is housebroken. Having her housebroken is good, but not great. Housebroken means eighty pounds of dog sitting on my back while I am trying to sleep. She often uses this technique for awakening me, with an ulterior motive in mind. The

dog once woke me at two in the morning, leading me to believe that she had a call of nature. Actually, it was more like a "call of the wild." Tina had seen a skunk from the window. As soon as I opened the door, she lit out after it. No need to tell you the consequences. This is not the type of thing I want to deal with at that time in the morning.

Tina does have a lighter side to her personality. Playtime has become a routine event. When she was a puppy, it was I who instigated playtime; now it is Tina who demands it. She will toss a dozen rubber toys to me until I consent to toss one back. There was one occasion when the dog's playful personality took control of the family meal time. Tina had dropped toy after toy into my lap while I was trying to dine. I had tolerated all that I could; I was fed-up, and so apparently was she. Shortly after I reprimanded her, a rubber chicken basted with doggie drool, flew into the air and landed directly into the bowl of pasta.

Of course, you know I really do like the canine creature. I never once thought of disowning her; she is more loyal than my children and more attentive than a spouse. But she is messy, she sheds, she is destructive, she has fleas, and if anything ever happens to her. . . THAT'S IT! NO MORE DOGS!

PRIME TIME

The lap used to belong to me. Now during prime time, or shall I say preen time, the cat jumps onto my father's lap, where he remains for hours. This is what my father calls Prime Time. Every night, somewhere after dinner and before going to bed, my father retires to the living room to watch TV for a while. He sits in his recliner and waits. Burly, my cat, will walk into the living room very casually, very aloof. He struts in, looking around, with an ugly look on his face. This is my father's favorite cat, mind you. He looks at my mother with a look of disgust and ambles to the side of my father's chair. Dad pats his lap and the cat jumps into it. This ritual goes on every night.

There, in Dad's lap, that cat will sit washing up, and then sleeping, purring as loud as a car engine (I am not exaggerating) until it is time to go to bed. He tells her that he cannot get up because the cat is on his lap, and does not want to disturb him! He makes my mom pick Burly up and put him on the couch or she will hold him until father has gotten up from the chair. This is all done so that Burly will not be mad at my father for disturbing him. My mother will be the one that must face the wrath of Burl.

You might think that I am making this up, but I am not. My house is kind of messed up. Somewhere along the line, my father's priorities have become confused. Instead of me sitting on my father's lap, the cat does. Instead of me getting all of his attention, the cat does. Instead of me getting spoiled, the cat does. And does he ever get spoiled! When my father gets up in the morning, he feeds the cats. This feeding consists of the usual meal a cat would eat: canned 9-Lives cat food, only the ground or sliced varieties, never the chunky kinds, crunchies to nibble on throughout the day, and a small bowl of milk, placed next to the water dish that is left for them.

When he comes home for lunch at 11:00, he feeds all the cats. This feeding usually consists of whatever kind of meat that was left over from my may parents' dinner the night before, possibly some fresh haddock, maybe even some lobster. Dad thinks that Burly's favorite food is fresh haddock. Usually though, the poor cats must be faced with some kind of poultry or beef. On those days, the cats may be depressed. Again, at 3:00 when my father comes home from work, the cats will be fed, only a small snack, some more of whatever they were fed at lunch time. Finally, after dinner, they will once again be fed leftovers from dinner.

Somewhere during the day, possibly when my mom comes home from work, around 2:00--2:30, the cats once again get normal, degrading cat food. It's a good thing that when they are forced to eat cat food, it is at least 9-Lives. I would think that they would prefer Fancy Feast; it is more expensive. Dad says they don't because real cats don't eat that. Fancy Feast is for prissy cats.

I try not to tell my Dad that he is spoiling the cats when he feeds them lobster, or when he takes a blanket and covers up the little angel, Burly, when he is slumbering. I try not to tell Dad that he is being a little ridiculous when he thinks that Burly is going to be mad at him if he makes him leave his lap. I try not to tell Dad that he is a little too lenient on Burly when the cat scratches the wall paper upstairs, and Dad says that he is releasing some kind of frustration, so he puts carpeting ten inches up the wall, so the cat can still scratch.

I try not to tell Dad that somewhere along the way, he forgot Daddy's little girl, and started to worship a fat hairball!



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